

CHAPTER NO. 911

SENATE BILL NO. 2485

By Haynes, Burks, Harper, Dixon, Cooper

Substituted for: House Bill No. 2738

By Williams, Hargrove, Cooper, Hood, Lewis, Eckles, Towns, Brooks

AN ACT To amend Tennessee Code Annotated, Title 49, Chapter 1 and Title 49, Chapter 6, relative to the Tennessee Literacy Initiative Act of 1999.

WHEREAS, Chapter 130 of the Public Acts of 1999, codified as Tennessee Code Annotated, Title 49, Chapter 1, Part 9, the "Tennessee Literacy Initiative Act of 1999", recognized the paramount importance of literacy in the 21st century and established a state goal that every public school student would be able to read at the appropriate level before being promoted to the 3rd grade; and

WHEREAS, As part of the "Tennessee Literacy Initiative Act of 1999", the Office of Education Accountability within the Office of the Comptroller of the Treasury was directed to evaluate the reading proficiency of Tennessee's elementary school children and make recommendations to ensure that the goal of appropriate reading proficiency before the 3rd grade be accomplished; and

WHEREAS, The Office of Education Accountability conducted its study and found that:

(1) Two separate assessments indicate that most Tennessee students are not successful in the area of reading;

(2) States that have maintained good reading scores or raised their reading scores over time have established reading as a funding and/or policy priority;

(3) Tennessee is the only southeastern state without a state-funded reading initiative;

(4) Tennessee lacks a reading infrastructure;

(5) Three prominent sources have rated Tennessee's standards for language arts as very low;

(6) Currently, the state sponsors no professional development workshop or class that deals with reading assessment strategies for the developmental grades. The professional development training that the Tennessee Department of Education now provides addresses assessment only in relation to TCAP (TerraNova) and Gateway testing;

(7) Many Tennessee teachers may lack the expertise needed to assess or assist children with reading difficulties. As in many states, future teachers educated in Tennessee's state universities are often required to take only one course in reading methodology. Researchers indicate that this amount of preservice training is inadequate;

(8) Some LEAs may lack the knowledge base to select reading programs and appropriate assessments that are supported by the latest research;

(9) Tennessee's teachers may not have access to sufficient professional development opportunities to bring them "up to speed" regarding the latest reading methodology research;

(10) Tennessee lacks an adequate number of English as Second Language (ESL) teachers; and

(11) Tennessee schools employ few reading specialists; and

WHEREAS, A state-supported and state-funded reading initiative may enhance Tennessee's ability to secure competitive federal grants targeting literacy; now, therefore,

BE IT ENACTED BY THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE STATE OF TENNESSEE:

SECTION 1. Tennessee Code Annotated, Title 49, Chapter 1, Part 9, is amended by adding the following new sections:

Section 49-1-904. The State Department of Education shall identify schools with consistently low reading scores in kindergarten through twelve (K-12) and assure that measures for improvement are addressed in the schools' improvement plans.

Section 49-1-905.

(a) By the 2001 annual joint meeting required by Section 49-1-302(a)(10), the State Board of Education and the Tennessee Higher Education Commission shall address specifically whether teacher candidates in Tennessee receive adequate training to teach all children to read. The state board is further directed to revise teacher training and certification requirements, as needed, to ensure that teacher candidates are properly trained and qualified.

(b) The State Board of Education and the Tennessee Higher Education Commission in conjunction with the University of Tennessee and the State Board of Regents shall consider development of an information center at a state university for research and information on reading for preschool through twelfth (12th) grade teachers and report their findings by the 2001 joint meeting.

Section 49-1-906. The Basic Education Program (BEP) Review Committee, created by Section 49-1-302(a)(4), shall examine whether English as Second Language (ESL) teachers and reading specialists should be included in the BEP funding formula created by Section 49-1-302(a)(4).

Section 49-1-907. The State Board of Education and the Tennessee Higher Education Commission, and the State Department of Education shall report at least annually to the Joint Oversight Committee on Education as to what actions are being taken to implement the provisions of this part.

Section 49-1-908. The Office of Education Accountability shall follow up on its study and report to the General Assembly by February 15, 2001, on the current status of literacy initiatives in the State of Tennessee.


SECTION 2. Tennessee Code Annotated, Title 49, Chapter 6, Part 60, is amended by adding the following language as a new appropriately designated section:

Section _____. The State Department of Education shall study failure rates of students taking the Tennessee Comprehensive Assessment Program test in any county having a population of not less than eight hundred twenty-five thousand (825,000) nor more than eight hundred thirty thousand (830,000) according to the 1990 federal census or any subsequent federal census, report on the factors influencing such rates, and shall make appropriate recommendations to the Governor and the General Assembly on or before February 1, 2001, to ensure that the goal of appropriate proficiency on the assessments is accomplished.


SECTION 3. This act shall take effect upon becoming law, the public welfare requiring it.

PASSED: June 9, 2000


JOHN S. WILDER
SPEAKER OF THE SENATE


JIMMY NAIFEH, SPEAKER
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

APPROVED this 19th day of June 2000


DON SUNDQUIST, GOVERNOR